

## Share Your Story...

### Illinois Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Development Home Visiting Program

Home visiting has a demonstrated track record of improving infant and maternal health outcomes. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is providing a critical way to engage children and families who are especially vulnerable during this time. Home visitors are on the front lines in supporting families by going above and beyond to quickly adapt and find creative ways to meet the basic needs of children and families.

Through its “Share Your Story” initiative, the Illinois Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program in the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development has provided an opportunity for home visitors to share on-the-ground stories of their experiences, including the bright spots as well as challenges. The focus of these stories is to bring attention to the amazing work they do, to share what has been working in serving families, and to illustrate how home visitors can be supported to continue carrying out their work.

### Erikson Institute MIECHV Home Visiting Assessment Project



The Erikson MIECHV Home Visiting Assessment Team has always considered the best part of our work to be the moments in which we have had the opportunity to visit programs, the staff, and the communities they serve. COVID-19 put a fast end to our ability to do this, and while we all had to adjust to working from home and changing the way our roles were conducted, we have seen a remarkable response from the programs with whom we have completed evaluations.

During this time, children haven’t stopped growing and families’ needs haven’t disappeared, ultimately meaning that the need for home visitors to continue to support families has not stopped. In

order to stay connected with the work that programs continue to do with families even in the middle of the pandemic, we have piloted virtual visits with four programs to avoid a complete halt to our work. “We wanted to be able to keep up with programs as they adjusted to virtual home visits, while also learning about the ways we as assessors can support agencies,” noted Erikson MIECHV Home Visiting staff Jennifer Baquedano and Emily Reznicek.

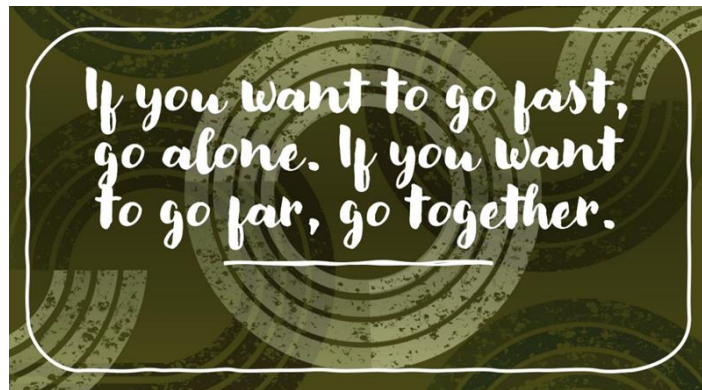
During our virtual site visits, we spoke to ten home visitors about their work and the challenges of connecting with families from a distance while still meeting their needs. “We have been blown away with continuous efforts to support high-risk families during this time,” said Jennifer and Emily. “Some home visitors went the extra mile, by taking food or other supplies to family homes without being able to sit and talk with the mom and baby. Others discussed the ways family engagement evolved over the past three months – from the novelty of video calls to technology burnout.”

While quarantine regulations have started to ease, home visitors have jumped at the opportunity to meet families where they are, even if it means a socially distant conversation in a family's yard. These stories demonstrated the ongoing care and passion home visitors have for the growth of their families.

Jennifer and Emily both expressed that maintaining these connections with programs has helped them see how evaluations fit into a larger frame of home visiting and how important it is to track changes to both the field and individual positions. They hope to have captured a moment in time that will have a lasting impact on everyone, no matter their role. Meanwhile, the Erikson team seeks to use these data and stories to understand and elaborate on both the significance of COVID-19 and ongoing social justice issues that will impact the field of home visiting.



The past three months have shown how much programs care for their families and the lengths they will go to ensure that families continue to receive the necessary services. "As a team, we are in awe of the programs' abilities to adjust to the new landscape to start seeing families without missing a beat," noted program staff.



Words of Encouragement from the Erikson Team to Home Visiting Programs....

*"We miss visiting with you all in your own offices and communities, but we know that as soon as it is safe again, we will be out there, seeing where the work is done and meeting the people that are making it happen."*

